

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

[P.4]

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A naming ceremony—women sitting in front of the mother's hut. (Crowd includes Diana Cohen, wife of the author).

Horsemen saluting a chief in Magumeri.

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6 THE SETTING

361 everyone knows where the boundaries lie between village areas, or between hamlets and other settlements, and there is plenty of land for expansion and for the wandering cattle nomads who traverse the area annually moving their cattle north and south with the coming and going of the rains.

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361 The settlements are all made up of walled compounds and within these are the mud-walled houses with conical thatched roofs, or sometimes grass mat walls with thatched roofs. In the northeast of Bornu the people specialize in a bee-hive shaped house of bound thatch which can be picked up and moved and can reach a size of twenty to thirty feet in diameter, although ten to fifteen feet is more common. A compound is almost always rectangular in shape with mud or grass mat walls and internal partitions. There is only one entrance which is often a house with two doors so that there is a shelter at the doorway for people to gather and visit with the household head. The compounds in any settlement are always arranged in a "U"-shape with the open end towards the west and the closed end on the east. The arms of the U then form the north and south sides of the open plaza where all the major events of town take place. Although in very tiny settlements, big cities, or settlements that have lost a great many people, this U-shape is not often easy to discover, it can be seen by simply asking people where they have their central plaza. When this is pointed out, the questioner knows exactly where to look for the house of the senior political leader of the settlement since his household is always at the bottom of the U in the center facing west. Parenthetically, this means [622] that when individuals or groups pray and bow down toward the east in the open plaza, which they often do, they face the doorway of their local political leader's compound. [788]

241 Around the villages are fields of millet, the major food staple, guinea corn, ground-nuts, the major cash crop, and numerous specialized crops of vegetables or gourds that vary from place to place depending upon local conditions. Almost everybody does a little farming while goods not produced within the household itself [443] are purchased at local weekly markets that dot the countryside in each of the major villages.

171 In their culture the Kanuri share ideas about religion, social organization, and subsistence patterns with many of the other peoples of the Western Sudan. [302] Even esoteric items such as pre-pubescent boys' hair styles are shared across wide areas of the southern and central Sahara ranging as far away as Morocco. In their [291] patterns of dress—workshirts and long ground-length robes for men, long shirts and saris for women—they again share many items with surrounding peoples as [231] they do in their love of horses which give a man prestige unless he is one of the [554] few in the cities that owns an automobile. Their language, Kanuri, is not related to other languages of Nigeria, but is shared and closely related to a large group of [197] tongues called Central Saharan that ranges from the Tibesti highlands in northern Chad to Bornu in the southwest and the Darfur region in the modern nation of

[193] Sudan, in the southeast. It is a graceful language in which the verb comes at the end of the sentence as in Latin and in which there are many polite circumlocutions [195] for saying things diplomatically. Thus if I wish to say a man is untrustworthy, I do not say it outright. Instead I say quietly that he has narrow eyes, which comes from the saying, "A man with narrow eyes has no shame," he lacks proper respect for his obligations to others. There are many greetings which are adjusted to social rank,

THE ORGANIZATION OF TRADE • 91

man and can well afford his car, chauffeur, and new cement-block compound with electricity and running water. Besides the scale of his operation which is quite large relative to Bornu enterprise in general, his way of organizing things is also typically Kanuri. Instead of an office building with secretaries, dictaphones, telephones, the uncle has built up a series of relationships among a set of dependents. These relationships are modelled on and grew out of exactly the same kinds of relations that exist in the Kanuri father-son relationship within a Kanuri household.

The remainder of Bornu trade is handled through a system of small and large companies. The large companies are European in origin, and until a few years ago each handled as much of the trade as possible. Today these large enterprises are increasingly African staffed, usually with southern Nigerians, and each tends to specialize in a few particular lines of the export-import trade. Besides these large enterprises there are small "canteens" (stores) run by Levantine traders and now increasingly by Kanuri traders themselves. These shops obtain stocks from the larger companies and sell to both consumers and wholesalers who hope to sell in small quantities.

In recent years the pattern of local economic life has changed but little. However, in the Bornu economy as a whole several new lines of development have started that are a far cry from the past. To the north of the capital city of Maiduguri in an area marked "industrial" on the provincial engineer's maps there is now a modern ground-nut oil mill and further to the east of this a large modern abattoir. In future years food processing and even manufacturing plants will appear in this area of the city. Secondly, the capital city itself is experiencing a building boom as the wealthy replace old mud houses with new ones made of concrete block. This plus the continual expansion of government buildings has produced a lucrative building trade. The local Bornu emirate government has in the past few years decided to spread its contracts out among many aspiring young building contractors, thus producing not one or two large companies but a growing number of small entrepreneurs who are gaining experience in business. This has also led to a local expansion of the concrete block industry which can easily be set up along the river where the sand is available and hand labor can be used in conjunction with cheap steel molds for making the concrete block.

Finally wealthy Kanuri men in the political system and in trade are beginning to look at the possibilities of investment as a form of wealth production. Some are buying property in the city for the rent income, or building on the land and then renting it; others or sometimes the same men are buying up adjoining small farms to the southeast of the city and turning them into mango and lemon orchards. One of these has even invested in a concrete block house at the back of his orchard that he intends to turn into a modern chicken farm with imported hens and roosters from the United States.

All of these developments seem to point away from household economy toward wages, urbanization, and the impersonality of western society in its workaday life. Will it happen? When will it happen? These are questions upon whose answer rests an entire way of life, for today the Bornu economy is essentially as described in this chapter yet these roots of change are growing points that are encouraged by the national and local leaders and by the western educational system. How much they will in fact transform the local life is a matter for future research.

100 • THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

634 general, the Shehu must feel he has gained a loyal supporter and any suspicion to
the contrary would bar an eligible contender from the position. The same applies
[645] in the case of members of the Shehu's council and especially its chairman, the Waz-
634 iri. People say that would-be applicants give gifts, attempt to link themselves by
662 marriage, and in general ingratiate themselves with the Shehu and his councilors
who play the major part in such decisions; however such things are not easy to ob-
serve directly. On the other hand several people have told me that they regularly
visit influential men in the city bringing gifts of cash and foodstuff and generally
paying their respects to these men in the hopes that one day when a proper vacancy
occurs, they will obtain the office of lawan. In other words this traditional mode of
soliciting an appointment is admitted to for the office of lawan.

634 In the district capital the district head's house is always at the east end of
592 the town plaza and is the most impressive compound in the village. The compound
[342] is regarded as emirate property and can only be used while the incumbent is in
[361] office after which time he must move out. In addition each district head has his
own compound in the royal ward of Maiduguri in the capital with a residing chief
subordinate (*wakil*) who appears at official state functions in the Shehu's court to
represent his superior. In his rural area the district head has a large group of fol-
634 lowers who live in his own compound and the surrounding vicinity. These men
592 form a group of linked households under their leader, the chief follower of the
571 district head who serves as his deputy in the latter's absence. In Magumeri a few of
these followers have been recruited during their own lifetime, but most of them are
the sons of men who have always been followers of this district head and his father
before him.

634 At first glance these followers are indistinguishable from ordinary peasants
571 except for the fact that some of them have expensive looking horses given to them
by the district head. They help collect nomad cattle taxes, run messages for the dis-
trict head, and never fail to ride in honor of their leader on special ceremonial oc-
casions or when an important visitor has come to town. Most important they must
be willing to leave town or move to another place whenever their superior is sta-
tioned elsewhere, while peasants are most often linked by social relations with a
particular spot. These men have only one allegiance—that of subordination, disci-
634 pline and respect to their superior, the district head. Thus they are never fully
571 trusted by the more permanent local residents. Indeed younger members of the dis-
578 trict head's following are often feared as well as mistrusted. They have no farms,
no wives, and no households of their own. They talk, play cards, drink, look for
amorous experiences in the local area, and are felt to be spies for the district head.
When such men approach a group of peasant menfolk, the conversation suddenly
stops, then slowly begins again on a note of pleasant but iridescent chit-chat in
which nothing really serious or informative about local affairs is ever mentioned.
Although the hierarchy of lawan and bullama under a district head is his official
administrative organization in the district, his followers form an unofficial organi-
zation to execute his policies. Unlike the lawan and bullama they are totally depen-
dent upon him for support and status in the society. In return they give him the
prestige that comes from having a large retinue of followers. They also organize
634 his tax collections, act as messengers, and sometimes they are even used to disci-
571 pline lawans who are not complying with administration demands. Thus one lawan
578 complained to a district head that he could not raise the tax assessment for his vil-
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369 characteristics of the folk society; individuals are specialists
632 of one sort or another; the towns are centers of government at
121 the district level; and stratification rather than social homogeneity characterizes their populations. In this sense it is important to distinguish between Kanuri culture in its urban manifestations and Kanuri culture in the rural villages. These two types of community exemplify two concomitant variants of Kanuri culture. Since there is no sharp line of demarcation indicating at which point a village turns into a town, the distinctions made here are seen to shade imperceptibly into one another. At their extremes, however, the differences are considerable.

621 Probably the bulk of the populace live in villages of less
[622] than 1,000 people. A Lowan, or more typically a Bulama in the smaller village, is the appointed political head of the village.

[463] There is little or no specialization, and everybody farms and depends entirely on the products of his agricultural labors.

[622] The Bulama lives at the same level as the rest of the village.

He may own a horse, and his household may be slightly larger,

[565] but he works in the fields as does everyone else. One man may be slightly wealthier than his neighbor, and may own several sheep and goats, but social classes do not exist. Villages are

[595] divided into compounds, within which a family lives. By and

[592] large, men in the villages have but a single wife, and she and

• 342 her children will live within the compound walls. In the villages, the compound walls are of woven mats (sagdi). The houses are almost entirely of the round-walled, thatched-roof type.

- 342 This is one of two house types which the Kanuri build, and is predominant in the villages. There are several variants of this house type. The walls may be of mud bricks, or they may be of woven mats. The first is of course more permanent. Paths separate groups of compounds, and larger streets divide the village. Trees are allowed to grow within the village to provide shade, but other vegetation is removed. Since Bornu is a flat plain, the huts of the small villages, amid the shade trees, jut out from the surrounding cleared landscape in dry season and are visible from a distance.

632 The towns are market centers, and frequently also administrative centers. Towns of some size are divided into wards, and each ward will have its own Lowan. The wards (nguro) are in turn made up of compounds. In the towns, stratification in the social structure is pronounced and wealth differences between heads of families may be great. This is reflected in size of compound and in house type. While the house type and compound of the poor commoner (talaka) in the town may be identical with that of the typical villager (compound walls made of sagdis enclosing a plot on which is built a single round-walled, thatched hut), the compounds of wealthy and important men are enclosed in walls of mud bricks some ten feet high, and the single entrance (chinna) may be framed in an impressive archway. The area of the compounds of important men may be several thousand square yards, and there may be upwards of twenty houses within. The predominant house type of the wealthy man in the

632 town is a square flat-roofed house built entirely of mud bricks,
 565
 342 with an adobe veneer and turreted roof decoration.
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361 Blocks of contiguous compounds, with their entrance-ways facing out onto the streets, make up clusters which are similar to a city block. Streets are laid out on a grid pattern, [363] some narrow and others wide thoroughfares. There is little [492] vehicular traffic, but there is a fair amount of traffic made up of camels and donkeys used as pack animals, and men on horses.

632 Wards may have different characters, especially in large [563] towns with non-Kanuri populations, where different ethnic groups will all cluster in one ward. Wards are also often sub-divided [463] into neighborhoods. These take their character from a particular type of craft localized in a neighborhood, or a single group of tradesmen dealing in the same commodity whose compounds are found located in one neighborhood.

632 Every Kanuri town is built around a central plaza called the dandal. The dandal is a cleared area running east to west, 361 faced with compounds and various public buildings on its north and south sides. The western border is frequently open. At the eastern end, with the dandal stretching out before it, is the entranceway to the compound of the Lowan or Ajia, the focal point of a Kanuri town. The entranceway of the Lowan or Ajia's [644] compound always faces west, into the setting sun. The palace of the Shehu in Maiduguri (the Shehuri) fronts on the great dandal; at its far end is one of the gates of the city.

000 Two other foci of the Kanuri town are the market-place and

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Unlike some of the larger district capitals, Magumeri has almost no mud houses. Conical, thatched roofed dwellings inside compounds having grass mat walls are the rule. Only the District Head's and the Alkali's (Muslim judge) compounds contain any mud walled dwellings, and only the District Head's compound has mud walls. In the larger villages and District capitals, mud walls are more common as are mud houses. This gives Magumeri village a more rural appearance than many other capitals, since it is in the small villages and hamlets that this type of house predominates.

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In Magumeri the pagan quarter in which millet beer is made is right in the village. More usually pagan quarters are at the extreme edge of a village or at some remove altogether from the main settlement.

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This then is Magumeri. Its representativeness of Kanuri society in general is probably as good as any other village in Bornu.

[114]

After having visited ten other district capitals, stayed in another for nearly a month, and the capital of the Emirate for three months, the writer is keenly aware of local differences but just as aware of the similarities in social life among all people who consider themselves Kanuri. These differences are especially pertinent in relation to the rural/urban dichotomy and between the upper and lower classes of the society. The writer is only too aware that any attempt at all-inclusive generalizations becomes perilous in the face of these ever present differentials in Kanuri life as a whole.

369 Another difference noticeable immediately to the 216.
 • 342 stranger is the house type. In the cities, people for the most part live
 829 in mud dwellings, often with corrugated iron roofing, while in the "bush"
 the peasant contents himself with a grass-roofed hut. In 1957-58 several
 of the rich leaders in Bornu were building, under private contract, city
 houses for themselves of burnt brick, with steel windows, electricity,
 and cement floors.

369 In Magumeri, complaints against rural people are always heard
 829 from the N.A. officials stationed there, whose homes are in Maiduguri, the
 capital. The constantly speak of the permanent residents of the bush as
 dirty and immoral, and claim that they would never marry a "bush" girl.

[585] When the District Head did marry a girl from a neighbouring rural town,
 the wedding foods cooked by her female relatives and distributed to the
 dignitaries of Magumeri were of such a low quality that it became a stand-
 ing joke to tell of the rural kind of marriage that the District Head had
 made. On the other hand, the rural people do not feel as great a difference
 between themselves and others of their own social level in the city. They
 know the city to be more heterogeneous ethnically than the rural areas, but
 this does not affect their lives a great deal, either in the bush or when
 in the city on visits. The rural person does, however, distinguish between
 himself and those like him, and the civil servant from the city who is in
 the bush to administer it. These administrative personnel are feared,
 respected, and considered to occupy a different world whose income is
 higher, and whose power is dangerous. The rural peasant consequently avoids
 the civil servant in the bush, unless his confidence is won over through
 continued and harmless association.

Class as Status and Socio-Cultural Segmentation

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In a complex stratified society having many dimensions of
 status and involving social mobility up or down these dimensions, the

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23/ of transportation besides walking. In the farm survey it was found that
 511 of seventy-five household heads questioned, about one-half (forty-five
 per cent) owned horses and better than half (fifty-nine per cent) owned
 from one to three donkeys. Horses, besides being modes of conveyance,
 are prestige objects of value per se, and thus are purchased for this
 latter purpose as well as their utilitarian value. Thus a man who al-
 ready owned a horse might trade it for a bigger, a faster, or a more
 beautiful one, i.e. for a number of non-economic as well as economic rea-
 sons.

• 342

There are four house types in general use in Bornu. Each
 one is progressively more durable than the other and more expensive.
 The diagrams on the next page illustrate these types of accommodation.
 Type "A" is usually replaced and rebuilt every three to four years,
 while types "B" and "C" may last up to ten years with only minor re-
 pairs. In larger towns and among the upper classes generally type "D",
 a mud-walled edifice with a domed mud roof braced on wooden arches is
 [178] the predominant variety. Today, burnt brick and cement with corrugated
 iron roofing is slowly coming in as a desirable building material at
 the top echelons of society.

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[356]

With the expansion of numbers in a household, the amount of
 huts must be increased and replacement costs and depreciation increase

[351]

proportionately. Compound walls are a similar expense. Zana mat (grass)
 walls must be replaced every two to three years while mud walls, only
 need repairs and maintenance after each rainy season, or perhaps after
 every two if they have been well constructed.

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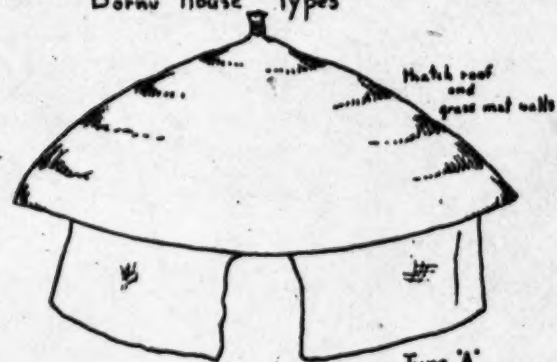
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Building is handled in two ways. A common method among the
 lower strata is for the household head aided by neighbours, friends and
 relatives to organize a serwa (co-operative work group). The women of

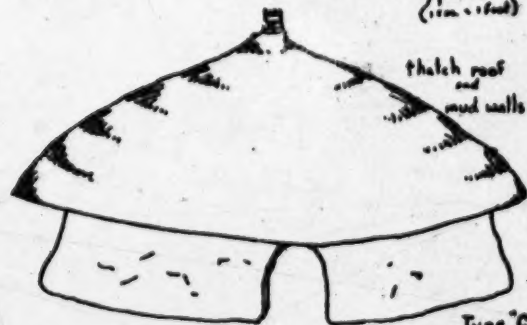
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Bornu House Types



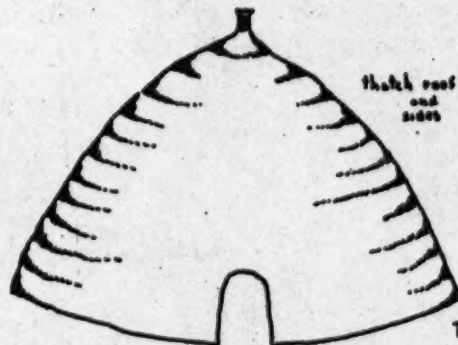
thatch roof
and
grass mat walls

Type "A"
(12m x 16ft)



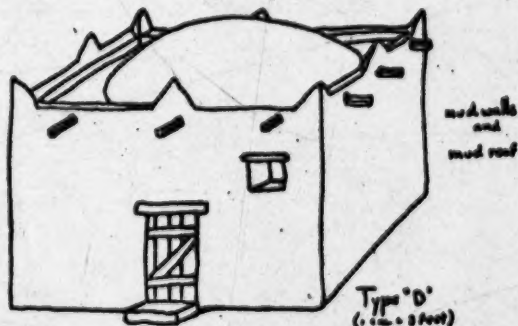
thatch roof
and
mud walls

Type "C"
(12m x 16ft)



thatch roof
and
mud walls

Type "B"
(12m x 16ft)



mud walls
and
mud roof

Type "D"
(12m x 16ft)

342 the house often aided by the wives of the serwa participants cook a large
476 meal for the men who build the house. Materials are bought by the own-
565 er. This method is only practised in the construction of house types

342 "A" and "B". Secondly, building with mud is carried out by specialists
331 and they must be employed and paid to build the house. However, this
565 requirement is not clearcut; specialists are also used to construct house
types "A" and "B", especially "B" which is a larger and more complicated
variety. The determining variable for the use of specialists is social
status. The higher the status of a male householder, the less likely
is he to use a serwa and the more likely is he to utilise specialist la-

[369] bour. Today in the cities, southern Nigerians, especially Ibo contract-
[363] ors, as well as a few Hausa and Kanuri, contract with both the govern-
ment and private individuals to build houses using combinations of both
traditional and western building techniques and design.

423 Rent is paid in the cities where houses are regularly pur-
[427] chased and sold by private persons. In rural areas, in the villages
[369] and hamlets, there is no need for house rental, since hew housing is
cheap and land is not scarce in or near the settlement. Land rights in
Bornu are not, however, so simple, for the Kanuri do not operate their
system of land tenure under one definite set of rules. The primary
criterion for land ownership is usufruct. The land is given to the pea-
[425] sant by the political leader of the community. The peasant and his de-
scendants hold this property for as long as they maintain its use, giving

423 the feudal leader a tithe every year on the produce. In Magumeri, the
632 Lawan (Village Head) has nominal control over all free land within a rad-
ius of about three-quarters of a mile from the town. Farms within this
circle are called kulo fatobe (compound or "House" farms), while those
beyond are called kulo karabe (bush farms). Permission should be sought